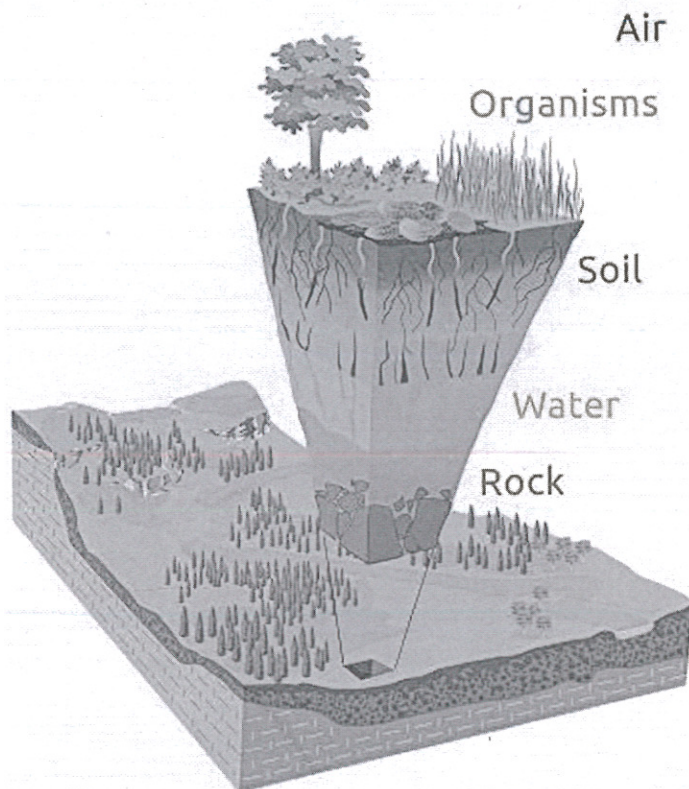


Earth's permeable near-surface layer... from the tops of the trees to the bottom of the groundwater.

It is a living, breathing, constantly evolving boundary layer where rock, soil, water, air, and living organisms interact. These complex interactions regulate the natural habitat and determine the availability of life-sustaining resources, including our food production and water quality.

The Critical Zone is Earth's outer skin



- The zone where rock meets life.
- A permeable layer from the tops of the trees to the bottom of the groundwater.
- An environment where rock, soil, water, air, and living organisms interact and shape the Earth's surface.

Water and atmospheric gases move through the porous Critical Zone, and living systems thrive in its surface and subsurface environments, shaped over time by biota, geology, and climate. All this activity transforms rock and biomass into the central component of the Critical Zone - soil; it also creates one of the most heterogenous and complex regions on Earth.